

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ETRD, ELAB, SY
SUBJECT: SYRIAN LABOR STANDARDS

REF: STATE 136706
FOLLOWING RESPONSES KEYED TO PARA 3 REFTEL.

- A) THERE IS NO FORCED OR SLAVE LABOR IN SYRIA. HOWEVER, SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE FORBIDDEN TO QUIT THEIR JOBS WITHOUT APPROVAL FROM THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE GOVERNMENT. THERE ARE FUTILE ATTEMPTS TO RESTRICT THE EMIGRATION OF SKILLED LABOR FROM THE COUNTRY AND TO RETAIN WORKERS AT LOW PAYING NATIONALIZED INDUSTRIES.
- B) THERE ARE EXTENSIVE LAWS REGULATING MINIMUM AGES AND CONDITIONS FOR CHILD/YOUTH LABOR IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR. CHILDREN 12 OR UNDER CANNOT BE HIRED. IN CERTAIN INDUSTRIES THIS PROHIBITION EXTENDS TO AGE 15 AND IN THE MOST DANGEROUS OCCUPATIONS AGE 17 IS THE MINIMUM (1959 LABOR LAW, ARTICLES 124 AND 125). ADDITIONALLY, THE HOURS THOSE UNDER 15 CAN WORK ARE STRICTLY REGULATED.
- C) SYRIA HAS A NUMBER OF LAWS ON THE BOOKS REGULATING THE SAFETY OF THE WORKPLACE. THE REGIME LIKES TO REPRESENT ITSELF AS EXTREMELY CONCERNED FOR THE WELFARE OF WORKERS AND PEASANTS. A CONSIDERABLE BODY OF LAW, FOR

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INSTANCE, DEALS WITH PROTECTING WORKERS FROM COTTON DUST IN THE EXTENSIVE TEXTILE INDUSTRY. THERE ARE OCCASIONAL COMPLAINTS FROM WORKERS THAT THESE LAWS ARE OBSERVED IN THE BREACH, PARTICULARLY, IN SMALL, PRIVATE OPERATIONS. ARTICLE 77 OF THE LABOR LAW GIVES THE WORKER THE RIGHT TO BREAK HIS CONTRACT IF DANGEROUS WORKING CONDITIONS ARE NOT RECTIFIED. ARTICLE 107 REQUIRES THE EMPLOYER TO INFORM

THE EMPLOYEE OF ANY DANGEROUS CONDITIONS. THE MINISTER OF LABOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR FORMULATING INDUSTRIAL SAFETY CODES FOR VARIOUS INDUSTRIES IN COOPERATION WITH EMPLOYEE AND WORKER REPRESENTATIVES (ARTICLES 108 AND 113).

- D) THERE IS A CONFUSING PATCHWORK OF LAW WHICH DEALS WITH FREE ZONES, INDUSTRIES WITH EXTENSIVE FOREIGN INVESTMENT (THESE GENERALLY ARE IMPORT SUBSTITUTION RATHER THAN EXPORT). THESE LAWS ARE SO VAGUE THAT THEY HAVE NOT SERVED TO ENCOURAGE FREE ZONE INVESTMENT. IN FACT, MOST BUSINESSES IN FREE ZONES PAY WELL ABOVE PUBLIC SECTOR RATES IN ORDER TO ATTRACT PRODUCTIVE WORKERS. UNIONS ARE GENERALLY CONTROLLED BY THE BAATH PARTY ALTHOUGH THE COMMUNISTS RETAIN INFLUENCE. STRIKES ARE NOT EXPLICITLY PERMITTED EVEN BY LAW AND PUBLIC SECTOR WAGES, WHILE RISING, REMAIN LOW. PRIVATE SECTOR WAGES ARE NOT REGULATED AND ARE FREQUENTLY THREE TIMES AS HIGH AS COMPARABLE PUBLIC SECTOR OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS. UNION LEADERS OCCASIONALLY TRY TO ASSERT SOME INDEPENDENCE BUT STOP WELL SHORT OF STRIKES. WILDCAT ACTIONS ARE, HOWEVER, NOT UNKNOWN.

- E) THE LABOR PRACTICES DESCRIBED APPLY TO THE ENTIRE COUNTRY. SEELYE

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